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A dose of fiber

Selectmen approve FIOS service for Duxbury

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DUXBURY —If you're one of those people who have called town hall to find out when Verizon's FIOS service is coming, your wait is over.

Monday, selectmen approved a contract with Verizon to launch the heavily publicized television service in Duxbury, bringing it into direct competition with Comcast, which until now has had a monopoly.

Bill Hewig, the attorney with Kopleman and Paige who assisted the Cable Advisory Committee in drafting the terms of the agreement, told selectmen that the license was for 10 years and that, by the end of this year, FIOS should be available throughout the town. Any house that is connected to aerial wires can already get the service. That's about 70 percent of the town, Hewig said.

Verizon can impose an additional connection fee on anyone whose house is more than 150 feet from the road, but, according to Peter Bowman, Verizon's VP of external affairs for the Boston Area, the company has not imposed that fee.

The most complicated part of the agreement involves the town's three community access channels. Verizon has agreed to pay 3.3 percent of its gross annual revenue collected in Duxbury to help fund them. That

figure can rise to 5 percent to match what Comcast may potentially pay. Comcast, Hewig said, is currently negotiating an arrangement with the town to pay 5 percent for its first three years and 4 percent after that.

Comcast currently operates the three community access channels, and rearranging how they are operated "is the dicey part of the agreement," Hewig said.

Verizon, he explained, will take over the distribution of the government and education channels, connecting into Town Hall and the high school. This will happen when Comcast reaches its agreement with the town. The main fire station and the senior center could also be wired into the system.

Comcast, it is hoped, will eventually run connections from the Alden School, the Performing Arts Center and the library.

"It's a bit of a leap of faith," Hewig admitted, but if all goes well, residents will be able to watch the government and education channels regardless of which service they use.

A similar arrangement exists in Billerica, Hewig said.

Also, Duxbury will join PACTV, the regional community access channel based in Plymouth. PACTV will receive 1.7 percent of Verizon's gross revenues, which is included in the 3.3

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percent being paid to the town.

At first, PACTV will only be available to Verizon subscribers. Hewig said the hope is Comcast will "feel the press of competition" to eventually connect to it.

The agreement also includes a \$90,000 advance on that fee. That money could be used to update the town's television equipment, which selectman

Elizabeth Sullivan described as "somewhat dated."

During its negotiations with the town, Comcast has refused to connect the town to PACTV, which Verizon agreed to do.

As for who will operate the government and education channels, Bill Kearney, chairman of the Cable Advisory Committee said a memorandum of understanding has been negotiated with the School

Department to turn over operation of them to the School Department.

Town Manager Richard MacDonald said DHS students would operate the two channels, an arrangement that concerned Sullivan, who asked what sort of adult supervision would be involved. She noted that residents "have some expectations for a consistent product," that selectmen and

School Committee meetings will be aired.

"There's going have to be some oversight," she said. "You can't have student volunteers be here every Monday night. What if they don't show up?"

Part of the cash grant, Hewig said, would be given to the schools to help get the new arrangement up and running.